ABRIDGED VERSION

GUIDE TO PARTICIPATORY FEMINIST RESEARCH

Myriam Gervais | Sandra Weber | Caroline Caron
GUIDE TO PARTICIPATORY FEMINIST RESEARCH
Abridged Version (English)

Produced under the direction of Myriam Gervais

Authors: Myriam Gervais, Sandra Weber, Caroline Caron
With assistance from Lysanne Rivard
Design: Sofia Misenheimer

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Institute for Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies (IGSF)
McGill University
3487 Peel St., 2nd Floor
Montreal (Quebec) H3A 1W7

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The development of this guide is part of a reflection process undertaken by the authors on the theoretical issues and methodological challenges encountered when conducting research inspired by the principles of participatory feminist research, also known as Feminist Participatory Action Research.

This guide is the result of collaboration between three researchers from different disciplines (Myriam Gervais, Sandra Weber, and Caroline Caron) who share a common participatory methodological framework. Drawing from research as diverse as the experiences of teenage mothers in Canada, discourses on hypersexualization in Quebec, or the marginalization of rural women in Africa, the authors aim to present potential solutions to the main dilemmas inherent to conducting participatory feminist research in the field.

This guide is intended primarily for graduate students wishing to undertake participatory feminist research, but the authors hope that it will also be of interest to those wishing to work with participatory visual methods in order to include girls’ and women’s experiential knowledge and perspectives in their research.

Our thanks to all who have been directly or indirectly involved in the development of this guide. Special thanks are extended to the co-producers involved in the authors’ various participatory research projects that inspired the content of this guide.

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Myriam Gervais
Institute for Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies, McGill University

Sandra Weber
Department of Education, Concordia University

Caroline Caron
Department of Social Services, Université du Québec en Outaouais
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In the participatory feminist research approach, girls and women actively participate in every stage of the research process in order to generate an analysis that is rooted in the reality of their daily lives. By explicitly aiming to change the social conditions of girls and women taking part in the research, the objective of participatory feminist research is to help transform society towards equality and justice, as advocated by feminism.

This training tool presents the key elements of participatory feminist research and explains how to design and carry out a research project inspired by its guiding principles. As the reader will see, conducting participatory feminist research requires that, for each project, the researcher reflects on how to conduct the research (implementation of an adequate research process or protocol) and determines its usefulness (to whom the research must benefit). The answers to these two questions will vary by topic and by context, but they point to the fact that participatory feminist research cannot be reduced to a standardized application of theory.

To help you master this research approach, which may seem demanding in many ways, this guide builds on lessons learned from practical research experiences. This document is motivated by the need to fill gaps in the literature on theoretical issues that confront the researcher throughout the research process.

Participatory feminist research is an approach centered on collaborative work with participants. The methods inspired by this approach are varied and innovative. This guide shares examples of research protocols using visual methods that are aligned with the principles and objectives of participatory feminist research. Special attention is paid to ethical issues and a checklist has been developed to guide the conceptualization and realization of such projects. A list of suggested readings addressing essential theoretical or conceptual aspects also accompanies certain sections of the guide.

Do research WITH girls and women to change their individual and collective conditions.
1.1 - WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY FEMINIST RESEARCH?

“Feminist research is distinctive in its focus on gender as a variable and analytical category, and its critical stance towards gender” (Harding, 1987, p 2).

Theorizing gender as a distinct analytical dimension has led feminist researchers to conduct research for girls and women. The main objective of this type of research is to understand and explain gender-based systemic biases in the context of a given problem. In the most current models, feminist research favors the use of qualitative methods to document girls' and women's experiences and to reveal their diversity.

In line with the values of feminist research, participatory research is also based on experiential knowledge. In this type of research collective inquiries are conducted with groups of girls and women to understand a problem that affects them and to propose solutions from which they can benefit, or that will have a direct impact on their lives. Thus, doing research with girls and women (instead of for girls and women) significantly alters the traditional position of researchers and reconfigures their relationships with participants. The implementation of participatory feminist research requires, in fact, the establishment of new research processes that encourage the sharing of power and a redistribution of research roles.

Concretely, participatory feminist research gives participants a central role in data collection and analysis. Conceptualizing research participants as co-researchers (Maguire, 1987: 40, Reid, 2004: 4), this research model explicitly values and recognizes the contribution of participants. In participatory feminist research, research participants are knowledgeable subjects and, as such, play an active role in the production of knowledge and in the analysis and dissemination of results. They are quite capable of evaluating and managing the risks associated with their participation in research.

Over the years, participatory feminist research experiences have clearly established that the information generated and analyzed in collaboration with girls and women sheds new light on the research topic and provides realistic and effective answers to the issues raised by the research (Lykes 2001, Mitchell 2008, Weber and Dixon 2010, Caron 2011, Gervais and Rivard 2013, Flynn et al 2015). This research model is therefore characterized by a commitment to research that is useful to the social group represented by the research participants and by generating information that influences the actions of other actors involved in solving the problem (Gatenby, Bev and María Humphries, 2000, 90).
It can thus be said that participatory feminist research “is a conceptual and methodological framework that enables a critical understanding of women’s multiple perspectives and works towards inclusion, participation and action, while confronting the underlying assumptions researchers bring into the research process” (Reid et al., 2006, p.316).

It should be noted that participatory research, as developed by feminist researchers, is aimed at research done directly with girls and women, and should not be confused with collaborative research or partnership research conducted by institutional actors (university actors in association with the community sector). However, some elements presented in this guide may inspire the practice of collaborative research or partnership research with a feminist perspective.

Glossary of Key Participatory Approaches

**Action Research:** Research conducted by researchers or by researchers with local actors, with or without a feminist perspective, to solve a particular problem.

**Collaborative or Partnership Research:** Research conducted by researchers or by researchers with local actors, with or without a feminist perspective, to document and co-construct knowledge with participants on a given issue.

**Participatory Research:** Research conducted by researchers or by researchers in collaboration with oppressed groups or community members, that acknowledges the importance of participants’ practical knowledge and lived experiences (but not differentiated by gender) and aims to emancipate participants by empowering them through research.

**Participatory Feminist Action Research:** Research based on the experiential knowledge and empowerment of girls and women and that is characterized by the use of collective inquiry with targeted girls and women to generate knowledge and take actions that promote change to their individual and collective conditions.
Participatory feminist research requires researchers to reflect not only on the goals pursued by the research but also on the interests and constraints of the participants. What’s more, the research must be meaningful for participants. Thus, one of the principles defended by this approach is the need to anchor the research process in the everyday reality of girls and women (Papaut 1995: 239, Lennie 1999: 98) and therefore, to pay attention to the ‘costs’ of participating in the research for the participants (Yoshihama and Carr, 2002: 96).

In other words, ensuring the full participation of girls and women targeted by the research is not enough; a reasonable level of participation must also be considered. As one of the scholars who developed this research approach explains: “One of the most underrated limitations on participatory research is simply time. While researchers may be able to invest their total work time in a participatory research project, participants continue their regular life activities” (Maguire, 1987: 47).

Defined as the ability to recognize the influence of one’s own values and conceptual and cultural baggage on the research content (Reid, 2004, pp. 11-12), reflexivity is an intrinsic part of the participatory research process. A reflexive practice allows the researcher to be aware of her own power, the power relationships that can develop within the research conducted, and to ensure respect for participants’ experiential knowledge.

Thus, the principles that guide the implementation of participatory feminist research are: (i) the production of knowledge in collaboration with girls and women targeted by the research; (ii) the implementation of measures that favor participants’ full participation and power to act as co-producers of the research; (iii) the development of a reflexive attitude and practice, and (iv) an aim for research results that generate useful social or political changes “for” and “defined” by girls and women.

Co-researchers or research co-producers?

We purposely use the term research co-producers instead of co-researchers because we recognize that, in fact, it is unrealistic to think that participants can be as involved as the researcher throughout the entire research process: from logistical planning to funding and to its implementation in every detail. Nevertheless, the notion of co-research is meaningful because, as many studies conducted in the most diverse socio-cultural contexts illustrate, participants play a significant role not only in the collection of information but also in the analysis and the dissemination of the conclusions generated by the conducted studies.

In summary, doing participatory feminist research means recognizing the plurality of knowledge as well as the contribution of participants’ experiential knowledge to feminist knowledge. It is also establishing non-hierarchical relationships between researchers and participants throughout the research process (including analysis, dissemination, and use of results). Interaction with all participants is a fundamental aspect of this approach and the way research is conducted is a central element of this research model. In practical terms, this means the full participation throughout every stage of the research of those who are being ‘studied’.
Having said that, how can we conduct feminist participatory research? One of the first steps of a participatory approach is to adapt the research process to this redefinition of roles between the researcher and the participants by choosing a methodology that offers the necessary flexibility to conduct this type of research. By favoring the full participation of participants as co-producers of the research, the methods presented in the next section provide an initial example of how to change roles within the research process.

CHECKLIST

Participatory feminist research is...

- the co-production of knowledge with girls and women targeted by the research on topics of interest to the participants
- the implementation of measures that favor the participation and empowerment of participants as co-producers of the research
- a reflexive attitude and practice
- aiming for social or political changes that are useful for and defined by girls and women co-producers of the research
Works Cited


Maguire, Patricia (1987), Doing participatory research: A feminist approach, Amherst (Mass), The Center for International Education, School of Education, University of Massachusetts, 269 p.


1.2 - PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH METHODS

By involving girls and women as co-producers in research, participatory feminist research aims to move away from research practices where the researcher determines and asks questions, analyzes information collected, and where participants are seen primarily as sources of information. Participatory feminist methodologies have a common objective of favoring research processes that go beyond traditional knowledge production practices. The research methods described below (photovoice, annotated album, photo-report, artistic installation) were designed to enable co-producers in research to participate actively in the production and analysis of knowledge about issues that directly affect them. The use of unconventional research techniques also increases participants’ opportunities to be heard, while significantly reducing the dominant position of researchers. The more conventional methods of qualitative research can also be used (such as focus groups) if they are implemented in the spirit of participatory research. Sometimes, the research context can make this option relevant and valuable.

Participatory feminist methodologies enable underlying participatory feminist research principles to concretely take shape. The use of research techniques that co-producers can fully master allows them a real influence on the information produced and analyzed as part of the research. This change in research practices has the effect of establishing a new way of producing knowledge and establishing de facto equality between researchers and participants.

CHECKLIST

Participatory methods...

- can be qualitative, unconventional, and even creative
- are designed to avoid the epistemic objectification of participants
- aim to decolonize relationships between researchers and participants
- serve to reveal participants’ experiential knowledge
- promote participants’ appropriation of the various research stages
- gives a voice to participants
- highlights the plurality of girls’ and women’s voices
- facilitates participation, exchange, discussion, and solidarity among participants
We briefly describe a sample of methodologies for conducting participatory feminist research. Factsheets detailing each protocol can be found at the end of this guidebook.

**Photovoice**

Photovoice is a participatory visual method that uses cameras to allow participants to illustrate, using the photos they have taken, how they perceive the problem under study, its causes, and the solutions they see. Each participant can express their own point of view and have the opportunity to explain to the other participants and to the researcher why she took her photos. The advantage of this method is to allow participants to generate their own information (photos) and to express more easily what they have to say on the topic or issue addressed. With the support of photos, the photovoice method helps to put participants on par with the researcher by reflecting their way of seeing and saying things on a topic of their concern. Moreover, with this method, the participants can share their analysis directly with decision-makers and experts during the exhibition of their photos in their immediate environment. Instead of photos, the method can be adapted to another visual medium: for example, videos captured on a cell phone or visual art techniques such as drawing.

**Photovoice AVISE**

Photovoice AVISE is an adaptation of the photovoice method to conduct research in a development context, for instance, in rural settings. While remaining faithful to the original idea of photovoice, this adaptation was designed to lead collective investigations with groups of girls and women often ignored or absent from debates on development issues or during consultations related to the monitoring and evaluation of programs or projects.

**Photo-Reports**

The photo-report is an innovative visual tool used to illustrate and disseminate the results of a photovoice project. By allowing researchers to directly discuss the issues raised by the participants during one-on-one meetings with stakeholders, the photo-report enables researchers to fulfill their commitment to the participants.
Annotated Albums

The annotated album is a visual method by which a participant takes photos or assembles photos already taken by other people. The assembly of the annotated album helps the participant to begin a reflection on a personal topic and/or a societal issue. The visual support of the album helps participants to explain and to share their experiences and/or perspectives.

Artistic Installations

By creating an artistic installation of various objects, the participants reflect on the role that these objects can play in their daily lives and on the meaning that can be attributed to them. Careful examination of a collection of ordinary objects can recall or evoke events and issues, and even help participants tell a story. This exercise allows participants to first reflect on a personal level and then extend their reflections to a broader social or community level.
PART II

HOW TO DESIGN A PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH PROJECT
Planning the Research Process

Participatory feminist research is based on the premise of knowledge equality between researcher and participants. It views participants as knowledgeable subjects at the centre of the research being conducted. Participant contribution to data production and analysis must be facilitated and explicitly recognized, and thus researchers must redefine their role in the research process.

The main challenge of participatory feminist research is to create the conditions for participants to master the research process so that they can fully take on their role as research co-producers. To operationalize the research process, the researcher must consider best practices, and if need be, develop new practices that can ensure a true participative approach to their research.

The way research is conducted is a main feature of this approach.

The research process should be designed to ensure decision sharing on: i) the topic under study, ii) the work schedule, iii) the data generated, iv) the content of the analysis, (iv) the dissemination of results, and (v) the facilitation of participants’ empowerment.

Moreover, participatory research requires the researcher to develop skills and attitudes that go beyond conventional research practices and to take risks. This includes having or developing skills to lead group discussions, being able to actively listen, being flexible and open during the implementation of the research process, having the ability to reorient research at the request of the co-producers, and lastly, coping with the uncertainty of results at the end of the research process. One way to prepare for the specific requirements of this approach is to “learn by doing,” that is to observe researchers in action or by integrating larger teams conducting participatory feminist research.
2.1 - HOW TO SELECT A RESEARCH THEME AND DETERMINE ITS RELEVANCE

In order to conduct research in collaboration with girls and women, researchers must answer the following questions: To what extent are potential participants interested in the research topic? Why should they agree to become co-producers? The answers to these questions lie in the selected research topic and the shape of the proposed project.

In participatory research, the research topic should respond to a request explicitly formulated by members of a community or group. This requirement is often difficult to fulfill because it relies on the existence of and access to organized groups. However, feminist research focused on girls and women involves people who rarely have the opportunity to express themselves in a public space, much less to make their own aspirations known.

One way of confirming the relevance and validity of a research topic under consideration is to obtain initial feedback from stakeholders in the community question. However, this approach has its limits because one of the objectives pursued by participatory feminist research is to inform and sensitize these same actors to the perspectives of groups that are often unknown or ignored by their interventions.

Therefore, as a general rule, the first step is to become familiar with the socio-cultural context in which the research will be conducted and to meet with the main stakeholders working in the field. Then with a better understanding of the context, an initial topic can be formulated or reformulated to better fit the everyday reality of co-producers. This topic can then be directly validated or modified by the participants during the first research meeting.

Research questions should, in fact, be developed in such a way as to ensure that they clearly express participants’ priorities on the topic and that they allow participants to share their experiences. Questions asked during research sessions should be stated in accessible language to ensure they are understood by all the participants.

The research environment informs research procedures
### EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS
(real or fictitious)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Focus of Study</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural poverty</td>
<td>The gendered constraints of women in agriculture in an African country</td>
<td>“What are the obstacles that prevent you from producing more? What obstacles prevent you from making more money?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low participation rate of girls in physical and sports activities</td>
<td>Girls' views on physical activity and sports at school</td>
<td>“When you participate in physical activities and sports at school, what do you like? What difficulties do you face that boys do not have? What are your suggestions for improving physical activity and sports at school?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout rates of girls at secondary and university levels</td>
<td>Girls' views on the correlation between dropout rates and unwanted pregnancies in an African country</td>
<td>“What are the causes of unwanted pregnancies? What do you think are some solutions?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The situation of orphans in post-genocide Rwanda</td>
<td>The perspectives of girls living on the street about their personal safety</td>
<td>“Is there a place where you feel in danger? Is there a place where you feel safe?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to resources for young homeless women</td>
<td>The gendered constraints of homeless women</td>
<td>“What barriers prevent you from accessing subsidized housing? What are the solutions to improve access to subsidized housing for young women?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of long-term care for senior women</td>
<td>Seniors' perspectives on home care</td>
<td>“Does the care you receive at the home meet your needs? What are your suggestions for improving home care for senior women?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2 - HOW TO APPROACH PARTICIPATION IN PARTICIPATORY FEMINIST RESEARCH

The main criterion guiding a researcher when it comes to ensuring the participatory nature of research is to maximize the degree of involvement of participants at all stages of research. Because participants have little time to invest in research, their constraints must be considered when developing the research process. That said, we present benchmarks and examples of how to ensure effective, continued, and empowering participation throughout the process.

Aligning the research theme with participants’ interests is a first step in ensuring their effective participation. Too often research topics are of interest primarily to those who are doing the research. The more a research question reflects or corresponds to participants’ concerns, the more involved they will be.

Use a visual method that simplifies research production and analysis, and keeps it accessible while empowering participants in some form (i.e. acquiring a new skill such as learning how to use a camera or a new form of artistic expression).

Adapt tools to the specific needs of study participants (i.e. a written description of the study and the objectives pursued, even in a simplified form, may not be the most appropriate tool for the research context).

Give priority to realistic timelines and meeting places that remove barriers to participation (i.e. short sessions, modulated schedule, friendly place, daycare services, reimbursement of travel expenses, etc.).

Commitment to sharing material produced, or explaining what will be done, contributes to a climate of collaboration and reciprocity. There are topics and contexts that are the subject of numerous quantitative and qualitative studies (surveys, interviews), and where the ‘surveyed’ spend time responding and sharing sensitive information without any return from the researchers (i.e. no restitution takes place and they are kept more or less in the dark about the content and conclusions of the studies carried out on them). This practice is unfortunately common and can be a source of great frustration for participants, especially when the research tackles an issue that concerns them and for which they do not see outcomes or benefits.

Overall, research procedures must be flexible and adapted to participants’ conditions and socio-cultural context, and particular attention must be paid to obstacles likely to affect the quality of participation, including language, transportation difficulties, or family obligations.
The document that researchers design to inform participants of the objectives of a research project should present and explain the research process in a simple and clear way. Each participant should receive a copy of this one-page document during the first meeting. They may use this document to explain the project to their family or non-participating members of their group or association. Depending on the circumstances, this document may help minor participants obtain the approval of a guardian.

2.3 - HOW TO CONTACT THE PARTICIPANTS TARGETED BY THE STUDY

One of the critical questions in developing participatory research is identifying and accessing participants that are representative of the population targeted by the study. Once the selection criteria have been established, it is necessary to establish links with an organization working on or with activities related to the topic (if not already done at the time of the initial investigation). This organization can act as an interface and directly recruit participants or facilitate their recruitment (i.e. school management, community association, front-line workers, project management, international aid organization, etc.). The use of organizations or structures known to participants facilitates the development of a trusting relationship with the researcher.

Another possible strategy is to align the topic and the research activity with the objectives and activities of the target organization or group and to provide training to the facilitators. This ensures that the research is not only an advantage for the organization, but that it also fits more easily into the calendar of activities that the organization already conducts with the participants.
2.4 - WHAT ETHICAL CRITERIA ARE APPLIED?

Participatory feminist research recognizes participants as knowledgeable partners in the production of data and in making decisions about the research process, as well as agents of change. You may ask how this principle reconciles with the notion of protecting participants against the potential risks that their participation in research may entail? In other words, does the participatory feminist research model place participants in a high-risk situation?

Many research experiences show that if research is contextualized and aligned with the concerns of participants, they are able to identify and control the potential risks associated with participation. Control of risks is often reflected in the weighted analysis and the pragmatic nature of solutions expressed by participants.

In sum, it is the responsibility of researchers to explain, in full, the project, its objectives, its purpose, and the intended commitment. This way, each participant is fully aware of the potential risks and consequences and can evaluate and decide for themselves whether or not to participate in the research. This approach to risk is more for the purpose of empowering participants to make their own decision, rather than wanting to protect the participants by leaving that decision in the hands of the researcher. This approach is more in line with participatory feminist research’s objective to promote equality and empower participants.

As for young girls in developing countries, we often portray them or imagine them as destitute victims, without resources and unable to express their problems or needs, let alone assert their rights. Research conducted with girls tends to show the opposite. This view, shared by most aid agencies, often leads them to speak on their behalf. But do the analyses made by experts and by local and international organizations correspond to those perceived and experienced by young girls? How can we make sure? Even in cases where participants are identified as vulnerable, they have practical knowledge and are experts in their experiences.
In this regard, consent and confidentiality should be obtained verbally during the first research meeting and then reiterated and formalized with written consent at the end of the project. This approach creates more favorable conditions for obtaining informed consent from participants about the use of visual and discussion data in a research context.

Furthermore, the anonymity recommended by ethics rules does not necessarily correspond to the wishes of participants. For example, practical experience shows that many participants, in different projects and with different visual methods, have consciously made the decision to stage themselves in photographs or other forms of visual art or to sign the narrative texts accompanying the visual data – even when researchers or facilitators had explained the possible risks of being identified.

Another criterion concerns the direct involvement of participants in the dissemination of results. Less conventional dissemination frameworks involving participants (i.e. albums, exhibitions, etc.) promote their empowerment, while significantly reducing researchers’ dominant position.

Being ethically responsible throughout the research also means that the researcher is aware that she cannot foreground her research imperatives or assume that participants can devote all the time necessary to research. Even in a participatory setting, the researcher has more time to dedicate to different aspects of the research than the participants.

In sum, based on various experiences of participatory research conducted in different socio-cultural contexts, the following points of reference can give shape to an ethical approach that respects both participants’ and researchers’ knowledge:

- know and respect the context in which the research is taking place;
- know and respect the way in which participants evaluate and manage the risks associated with their participation and the dissemination of potentially sensitive information;
- create the conditions for obtaining informed consent;
- and, finally, respect the knowledge and results generated by the participants.

Each project requires thinking about how to best establish procedures that will facilitate the involvement of targeted participants. If necessary, researchers can adapt protocols of the selected method, as long as the basic principles are respected.
## Checklist - Conceptualization and Planning

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is the research topic of interest and relevant to participants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Is the research theme validated by key stakeholders and/or future participants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Will the results generated by the research be useful for the participants, stakeholders, and decision-makers in the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Are the research questions clearly formulated and understandable for the participants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Is the recruitment strategy for participants adapted to the context in which the project is taking place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Is the recruitment done in collaboration with entities or organizations recognized and respected by the targeted participants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Does the selected method facilitate the expression of participants and their participation as co-producers? Is the protocol developed or adjusted according to the context and content of the research?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Is the production of data (and its logistics) envisioned in realistic terms and fits the research context:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Communication tools are explicit (and in accessible language) about what and who the research is for;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Communication tools are explicit (and in accessible language) about how the research will (or may) be conducted;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) A method for learning the data collection techniques is selected (if relevant);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d) The intended procedures to obtain the consent of the participants are in line with the notion of knowledgeable participants;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e) The project has the audio-visual equipment and equipment required to apply the protocol of the participatory method selected;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f) The project has measures/strategies in place to overcome the constraints and responsibilities of the participants (flexible activity schedule, travel expenses, daycare fees, duration of activities depending on the availability of participants, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Will the selected research process allow participants to intervene, change, and/or adapt elements of research and data production at any time to better reflect their interests, needs and/or their constraints?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Do the research dissemination activities position participants as co-producers?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conducting the research

2.5 - HOW TO MAINTAIN A RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP

The values conveyed by participatory research must be considered and applied during the implementation phase. As previously noted, participatory feminist research moves away from research practices where the researcher determines the questions and analyzes collected information. The challenge in conducting research is to ensure that the conditions are optimal for ensuring that participants are equal to researchers. There should be no hierarchy. The choice of a method that focuses on the acquisition of new skills for participants (i.e. cameras, videos, exhibitions, etc.) and promotes personal expression through various visual aids (i.e. drawing, photo, album, video capsule), helps to, for instance, remain faithful to the principles of participatory feminist research.

Another possible strategy is for facilitators to lead research sessions (rather than the researcher) and establish conditions conducive to helping participants master the data collection techniques and share their analysis. The presence of facilitators allows, among other things, for each participant to receive the appropriate attention and assistance. Facilitators who are familiar with participants’ context can also reduce the chance for biases stemming from a researcher’s different socio-cultural background. In this case, researchers can take a less dominant role or simply observe. In the absence of facilitators, it is advisable to have someone present to support the researcher in various tasks (i.e. assistance to participants, management of equipment, etc.).

2.6 - TYPES OF RESEARCH AVAILABLE TO COPRODUCERS

The use of visual methods requires equipment that can be expensive. It is the responsibility of the researcher to plan for and make the necessary material available to participants so they may carry out the activities planned for the research. It would be risky to assume that all participants could, for example, have cell phones with the ability to take pictures or film videos, or to assume that participants could bear the costs associated with their use. Depending on the circumstances, even the most basic material (i.e. pencils, paper, etc.) may be an issue for proceeding with the research, if this need has not been anticipated by the researcher.
2.7 - Joint Analysis of the Data

In other qualitative and quantitative research practices, data is essentially collected by the researcher. Thus, the analysis and interpretation of the results also remain under her sole control. Co-analysis with beneficiaries or other partners in the practice setting involved in the research is therefore not considered. They are more often perceived as users of the generated knowledge, and rarely as holders of practical knowledge essential for the interpretation of the research results.

In the context of participatory feminist research conducted directly with girls and women, who controls the analysis and interpretation of the results? The desired democratization of the relationship between researchers and participants must, logically, be reflected in the analysis process. Because they structure the activities with the participants, the photos, the narrative texts, the annotated albums, the video clips, and the group discussions represent most of the data generated. Produced by participants, this data presents and supports their own analysis. The participants are thus able to put forward their individual point of view and then identify in a collective discussion the points that will be agreed upon. This shift from the individual perspective (personal issue) of the participants to a collective position on one or two priority issues results in a common understanding of the issues of the topic studied with the researcher.

On this basis, the other elements of the research process include a common analysis around the points that have been agreed upon and the presentation of the material produced, either in the form of a local exhibition or in another form adapted to the context suitable for the participants. In keeping with the spirit of participatory feminist research, relationships with participants go beyond a one-way relationship to become a reciprocal relationship where participants generate their own information, share their personal reflections on the topic, see their analysis directly in the results of the research, and largely control the dissemination of the results. The approach thus combines a process of empowering participants with opportunities to act by making their points of view known to people who have a direct influence on their lives.

"Participatory feminist research is conducted by ‘us,’ not ‘I’."
**Researcher Responsibilities & Obligations**

- Ethical responsibility: To foster equal relationships with co-producers throughout the research process.
- To determine a research topic based on the interests of co-producers.
- To develop research procedures that foster ownership of the research process by co-producers.
- To respect the knowledge and the conclusions of the participants.
- To adapt the dissemination of the results according to the context.
Disseminating the results

2.8 - NEW DISSEMINATION FRAMEWORKS FOR GREATER IMPACT

One way to involve participants in sharing the results is to rethink the ways of disseminating the information generated by the research and, more specifically, to avoid the usual frameworks (i.e. reports, articles, conferences) that are not necessarily useful for co-producers. Researchers should focus on forms of dissemination that reflect participants’ way of seeing and saying things. This does not exclude the writing of a report, an article or a thesis, or the holding of a seminar. However, academic communication methods are often inadequate to initiate effective strategic actions (publication deadlines are too long, academic discourse is out of reach for practitioners and participants, etc.). Innovative dissemination frameworks that highlight the visual representations produced by the participants (i.e. photos, albums, drawings, collages, etc.) capture more attention and interest than academic discourse (see Part III of this guide and the section titled ‘Why Images?’).

The selected form of research dissemination should be mastered by the participants and be adapted to the context in which research was conducted. Returning months later to offer a copy of the published report or book to disseminate results to participants who do not speak the language in which the book was published is the type of error that is best avoided in participatory research. The presentation of research results by co-producers during exhibitions or art installations organized in their community and attended by community members, stakeholders, project management, or local authorities, allows participants to interact directly with experts and decision-makers, and to more effectively engage stakeholders and authorities concerned with the research findings. Research can thus lead to action if the process creates the conditions for participants to control the dissemination of results.

It is not sufficient for participatory approaches to simply allow participants to express themselves in research.

A dissemination method that is not the exclusive to the researcher fosters peer-to-peer relations between the researcher and the co-producers, thereby substantially reducing the problems of the researcher’s subjectivity and interpretation. Moreover, when community members and interlocutors approve of the co-producers’ analyses, it becomes difficult for the findings to be disputed or challenged by the decision-makers or stakeholders concerned.
Notes:
GUIDE TO PARTICIPATORY FEMINIST RESEARCH

PART III

EXAMPLES OF VISUAL METHODS
RESEARCH PROTOCOLS
3.1 – WHY IMAGES?  

Images can be directly visual, but they can also be generated or evoked through literature, poetry, dance, and performance. Here are five good reasons to use visual and artistic methods in participatory research projects:

1. Images can be used to capture the ineffable, the hard-to-put-into-words.

Some ideas or feelings are more easily shared through a visual medium. Images can help us access those elusive, hard-to-put-into-words aspects of knowledge that might otherwise remain hidden or are ignored.

2. Images make us pay attention and are more likely to be memorable than traditional academic discourse.

Art makes us look; it engages us and disarms or bypasses the purely intellectual, leading to a more authentic and complete glimpse of what a particular experience can be like, of what people think and feel. Some images are more memorable than academic texts, and therefore more likely to influence the ways we think and act. Images elicit emotional as well as intellectual responses. They have overtones that stay with us and have a habit of popping up unbidden, later on. Using images as representation thus increases the likelihood of making an impact on the reader/viewer/community. Art can therefore help participants disseminate their research results across a wider audience by sharing their thoughts and feelings, both literally and figuratively.

3. Images can enhance empathic understanding.

Images literally help us adopt someone else’s gaze, see someone else’s point of view, and borrow their experience for a moment. This enables a comparison with our own views and experience. Artful representation works well when it facilitates empathy or enables the viewer to see through the participants’ eyes.

4. Images can be more accessible than most forms of academic discourse.

A traditional academic text can only reach a very limited audience, and as such, does not encourage public debates on significant issues outside of academia. Because they are widely accessible, images are power tools that can enable exchanges on topics of interest.

5. Images provoke action for social justice.

While the topic of an image can be very intimate, the image itself stems from a particular context and, as such, is a socio-cultural product that can influence individual or collective action. Authentic, nuanced, and contextualized images can contribute to social change by influencing concrete actions taken towards the common good.

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1 From a chapter titled ‘Visual images in research’ written by Sandra Weber and published in J. G. Knowles and A. L. Cole (2008), Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues, Sage Press, pp. 41-54.
3.2 - PHOTOVOICE

Definition

Developed by Caroline Wang (1997), a health science researcher, photovoice is a method that enables girls and women to control the photographic process in order to express, reflect, and communicate their everyday lives as well as share their perspectives and analyses.

Objectives

- To record and discuss issues and/or solutions proposed by individuals, a community and/or a group.
- To promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through small and large group discussion of photographs taken by participants.
- To reach policy makers and bring participants’ analyses and recommendations to their attention.

Underlying principles

- Images teach. Both implicitly and explicitly, images help to shape our concepts of what is real, what is normal, what is wrong, what is possible. (see also, Spence, 1995 and Weber, 2008)
- Pictures can influence policy, setting the public agenda about what people pay attention to.
- The community and people who are affected by policy ought to participate in creating and defining the images that shape policy.
- Policies derived from the integration of local knowledge, skills, and resources within affected populations will be more effective.

Overview of protocol

The method involves small groups of participants taking photographs or assembling photographs taken by others around a theme or issue of their choosing; meeting frequently to show, discuss, and analyze their photographs; preparing a photo essay or notated album or slide show; and then deciding on a suitable format and venue to present their research to policy makers.

Note: This general protocol can be adapted to multiple digital formats, using, for example, cell phone videos and social media. It can also be adapted to using drawings or other art forms in combination with or instead of photographs.
Photovoice general protocol

1. In light of the research project’s intended general focus, recruit a target group of policy makers or community leaders who would be interested in the results of the project and who are well placed to help effect changes in policy or practices.

2. Who is the research for and what is it about? Select and recruit a group of 7-10 photovoice participants whose everyday lives might be a good focus of the project.

3. Introduce photovoice methods to the participants and facilitate a group discussion. The specifics of the protocol should be negotiated with participants.

4. Obtain informed consent and consider the implications and parameters of taking pictures of other people. (See Section 2.4 of this handbook for details re: informed consent)

5. Through discussion and brainstorming with the participants, establish an initial theme for taking pictures (subject to modification as participants come together in future meeting to share and discuss the photos they have taken). The focus of the research might change. What academic researchers think are the important questions might not be the real issues that concern or affect people. Be prepared to change the focus as group discussions around photographs proceed.

6. Ensure that each participant has access to a camera and, if necessary, explain how to take photographs. You can offer some helpful tips, such as not to face the sun when taking photographs, to be creative when staging photographs, etc.

7. Facilitate a series of group meetings to select, contextualize, and codify the themes or issues that emerge from sharing and examining the images.
   a) Each participant might be asked to select and talk about one or two photographs that she feels are most significant or that she especially likes or dislikes.
   b) Participants might frame stories about their picture or take a critical stance on their photos in terms of questions like: What do you see here? What is really happening here? How does this relate to our lives? Why does this strength or problem or situation exist? What might we want to do about it?
   c) Through group discussion with the researcher, look at the links between photos and stories. The participants might identify themes, common concerns, or theories that arise from and across their images. The initial discussions will then guide further rounds of photo taking.
When the participants and researchers feel that they have covered enough ground, and gained enough insight, prepare a presentation to synthesize and share results. After the initial series of meetings to discuss and individual photos, the participants might work on a collective photo montage or other format or they might work separately to prepare individual albums or slide shows or scrapbooks or photo essays. (Note: See, for example, the protocol for curated albums).

Choose a dissemination format and venue, draw up a list of recommendations (if possible and appropriate), and “go public” to share photos and stories with other community members and/or with policy makers.

References and suggested reading


3.3 - ADAPTING PHOTOVOICE: THE SMART WAY

Participatory feminist research promotes the direct involvement of girls and women who are often left out of program or intervention monitoring and evaluation, particularly in developing countries.

Definition

The AVISE photovoice is an adaptation of the photovoice method to a development context in order to lead collective investigations with girls and women, specially in a rural setting. This method (and its protocol) was designed for collaborative studies with rural women by Myriam Gervais in Burkina Faso and Rwanda.

Objective

The AVISE photovoice, by allowing the participants to express their way of seeing and saying things (with the support of photos taken by themselves) on a topic that reflects their own concerns, helps participants and researchers to collaborate in an equitable manner.

Underlying principles

The establishment of a truly participatory research process with girls and rural women takes into account the social context in which the participants evolve, their specific constraints, and puts in place measures to ensure that all participants are treated on an equal footing (whether between them, with the researcher or with other stakeholders present). In concrete terms, this means that:

- participants participate in every step of the research;
- interaction with and among all participants is preferred;
- each person can have a different point of view and must have the opportunity to express it, and assert it;
- the research is designed and conducted in a way that facilitates the control of the research process by the participants;
- at least one form of dissemination of the results is directly undertaken by the participants;
- sessions are organized in such a way that respects participants’ contexts and constraints to participating in the study.
Overview of AVISE Photovoice

Appropriate, Visual, Interactive & Iterative, Significant, Explicit

A: Appropriate

Socio-cultural and economic factors are considered to adapt the photovoice sessions to the specific constraints of the participants and to determine how to proceed (for example, to design and revise the session schedule according to the availability of the participants).

V: Visual

The research develops material based on photos and pictograms to facilitate rural women’s control of data collection and analysis procedures throughout the photovoice sessions.

I: Interactive & Iterative

The explanations provided by the researchers are repeated several times and in various forms to ensure that the participants have understood, particularly regarding the purpose of the exercise and the learning of the camera. The analysis is conducted jointly by the participants and the researchers.

S: Significant

The question asked or investigated in the photovoice sessions should be formulated to reflect the participants’ concerns on the topic.

E: Explicit

Participants directly disseminate the results during a participatory exhibition that is attended by experts and decision-makers.
PART III GUIDE TO PARTICIPATORY FEMINIST RESEARCH

General protocol

Participants are encouraged to take pictures of what they perceive to be the issue of concern, either by photographing something that represents the problem at stake, or by taking a snapshot of what they perceive to be a solution to this problem. Then, the participants examine the photos and discuss in a group. Following these discussions, they give a title to each photo and include (or dictate) a short-written explanation. The photos accompanied by the narrative text are presented as part of an exhibition to an audience determined by the participants.

QUESTION/THEME

Define the theme of the photovoice sessions according to the participants’ own interests and in an accessible language.

REQUIRED MATERIAL

✓ Digital cameras
✓ Printer, ink, and photo paper (optional)
✓ Pens or pencils to write a description of the photos
✓ Black cardboard for framing photos (+ glue or tape and scissors)
✓ Examples of photos (if available)
✓ Consent forms

DIAGRAM DESCRIBING A PHOTOVoice PROCESS

A diagram is designed to present a pictorial description of the photovoice sessions. This tool is useful for describing to participants, and in particular to illiterate participants, the photovoice process for which their participation is requested.

The sessions are conducted with groups of 6 to 8 people (it is preferable that the recruitment process is done through grassroots organizations known to participants to establish trust). The number of sessions depends on the context and the wishes expressed by the participants.
SESSION 1: GET ACQUAINTED WITH THE PHOTOVOICE PROCESS

1. Present the purpose and reasons for the exercise using the diagram and answer all questions.

2. Present the research question that will be explored and validate it or modify it with the participants.

3. Explain how the photovoice activity will take place (the number of meetings, their duration, the organization, the content of each meeting).

4. Explain their rights as participants (participation on a voluntary basis, right to withdraw at any time from the activities) and ask them for their verbal consent on the whole process (it is better to ask for their written consent at the end of process).

5. The participants form small groups of 2 people who will share a camera (each member of the group should have the opportunity to take pictures).

6. Distribute the cameras so that the participants can become familiar with the cameras or learn, with your help, the practical handling. Explain the basic functions of the camera, as well as the effect of light and movement (Example: use of the flash inside, etc.). You can also explain some basic techniques for taking pictures as well as giving tips on how to get better pictures. Encourage participants to take photos that show landscapes or objects to avoid taking pictures of people. If participants take pictures of people, discuss the different possible positions that people can take to comply with ethical guidelines (for example, only a part of the body, take a picture at a distance or of the back). Explain the importance of obtaining consent (verbal or written) from people who will be photographed.

7. Each participant takes about 8 photos illustrating some of her ‘problems’ or ‘solutions’ to these problems. Each group will take about 16 photos.

8. Plan with participants when the pictures will be taken and when upcoming sessions will be held.
SESSION 2: “I TOOK THIS PICTURE BECAUSE ...”

1. Each group of two participants looks at the photos taken on the camera screen and identifies the photos that cannot be used for ethical reasons. The group must then select 2 photos: 1 photo per person that represents either a problem or obstacle, or is a solution to this problem. After selecting the photos, the facilitator retrieves the memory cards from each group and, together with the group members, prints the selected photos. Once the photos have been printed, participants are invited to present to the other participants the two selected photos and their meanings. The beginning of each presentation can be as simple as: “I took this picture because ...”

2. It is important for participants to be able to express themselves freely, one at a time, about the photos they have chosen. The role of the facilitator is to listen, to ask questions to clarify the participant’s comment if it is unclear, and to allow other participants to respond to this comment. When the discussion around the photos is over, the facilitator can identify points of common ground and re-launch the discussion on points of consensus.

3. Discussion of the conclusions generated by the photos and ideas. Once the reflection on the photos is finished, the participants are invited to write (or dictate) a title and a brief description (2 to 3 sentences or only a few words). The facilitator can help the participants formulate the short description of each photo.

4. Use the diagram of the photovoice process to explain the purpose and form of an exhibition. Ask participants if they want to display their photos and if so, where, when, and for what audience (association members, representatives, and members of the community, local elected officials, experts, project staff, etc.). Also ask who wants to take part in the organization of the exhibition, with the support of the facilitator and the researcher. Using a photo, show an example of an exhibition to make the latter more concrete.
Guidelines for the exhibition and dissemination of photos

For the exhibition, each photo is accompanied by a short description of the subject explored in the photo and the message to be transmitted by the photo. The names of the photographers - for those who formally asked for it - are included.

✓ If relevant, be sure to include a note that specifies that the people in the photos are involved in a staging and have agreed to have their picture taken.

✓ Obtain the written consent of each participant to exhibit their photos at the show, and obtain permission to reproduce them as part of the study.

Who owns the photos after the local exhibition?

The researcher ensures that the photos will be given to each participant after the exhibition (unless they have agreed to keep the material produced intact for advocacy purposes or to give them to a local institution of their choice).

References and suggested reading

3.4 - PHOTO-REPORT

Definition

The photo-report is a visual tool used to disseminate the results of a Photovoice project. It can also be used as a visual interview guide with key decision-makers (Rivard, 2015; Rivard, 2013).

Objective

The photo-report aims to rapidly bridge the gap between participants and decision-makers in a direct, accessible, and low-cost manner.

Underlying principles

The dissemination of research results is generally conceived as a separate process from data collection and analysis, and thus is usually implemented only once the project is completed. Because participatory feminist research calls for participants to be involved in each step of the research, this includes the dissemination of results, which must also contribute to social change.

The photo-report is a visual tool that enables participants and researchers to integrate the dissemination of Photovoice results into the research process. The compilation of participants’ photos in the form of an album representing their priorities, their analyses, and their recommendations, offers the opportunity to quickly share the main results with key decision-makers.

Overview

With the objective of simplifying the dissemination of results and to make it captivating and easily accessible to different audiences, the photo-report follows the form of a PowerPoint presentation and is comprised of the following three elements for each slide:

- Title: question or theme explored by the participants;
- Sub-title: a priority or main theme identified by the participants;
- Content: a few photos taken by the participants that illustrate and/or explain the priority/theme.
General protocol

1. With the participants, identify important ideas to share with key decision-makers.

2. Make the slides following the model described above. Make sure to have each participant’s consent to share their photos for dissemination purposes. Add a title slide and a conclusion slide.

3. Print the photo-report in colour. Give a paper copy and/or a digital copy to each participant so that they can have the results of the research and be able to disseminate them as they wish.

4. The visual document can also be used as an interview guide with key decision-makers in order to further discuss participants’ ideas. Depending on the context and the participants, they may not be able to or want to disseminate the results themselves directly to decision-makers. In this case, the photo-report, even if it is presented by the researcher or a third-party, clearly demonstrates the work and the analyses of the participants. When it is used as an interview guide by the researcher or a participant, not only are everyone’s ideas shared, but it is the participants’ ideas that determine and are at the centre of the discussions with decision-makers.

5. Give a paper and/or digital copy to each decision-maker in order for them to have the research results and to share them with their colleagues and/or superiors.

References and suggested reading

Rivard, Lysanne (2015), Gender, Physical education, and Sport: Bringing forward Rwandan girls’ perspectives on their lived experiences of physical activity and sport in secondary schools, (Doctoral thesis), Montreal, McGill University, 261p.

3.5 - CURATED PHOTO ALBUM

Definition

The annotated album is a visual methodological tool in which a participant takes photos or assembles photos already taken by other people to explore a theme that concerns them (Mitchell, Weber, and Pithouse, 2009).

Objective

Exploring a theme, question, or story of particular interest to the participant.

Underlying principles

An image can contain a message. Implicitly and explicitly, images can influence our view of reality, of what is considered normal, what we consider to be bad, unfair, or possible as a change (see Spence 1995, Weber 2008). A photo can influence a policy, program, and/or public or organizational agenda by drawing attention to a particular issue.

Overview

The assembly of the annotated album helps the participant to begin a reflection on a personal subject and/or societal issue with the help of a visual support to explain and share his experience and/or his perspective. For example, research may aim at documenting, through family albums, memorial and identity narrations on an intergenerational basis of major events or social or political upheavals.

General protocol

1. The number of sessions and their duration must reflect and respect the interest and the availabilities of the research participants. During the first meeting, participants work in small groups and each participant selects a theme, a question, or a narrative that they would like to explore in this activity.

2. Facilitated by the researcher, the following steps can be implemented in the following manner:

3. Find or take images that appear to you to be linked to a theme, question, or narrative that is relevant to your life and that you would like to explore in this project. Be respectful of other people when you take or use photos that include them. Photographing objects or places that are significant can be very effective. You can include pictures of yourself (selfies) or ask others to photograph you. Take or look for photos that mean something to you.

4. Choose 7-8 (no more) of these photos for your album. It is hard to choose when you have a lot of photos. Discussing this selection process with others in the group might be helpful, but listen to your own instincts and voice, you decide. Which ones show or say the most? Which ones tell a story or reflect the complexity or your reality?

5. Play with the order in which to place these photos, one photo per page, until you feel it works well. In some situations, you might want to place 2 photos that speak to each other on the same page.
6. Write a short caption for each photo (beside or under; typed or hand written).

7. Find a good title for your album, to put on the cover.

8. Say something about your album as a whole. On the first page, include a brief (about 150 words) “curatorial” statement about your album, to introduce and frame it, to help the viewer see it the way you wish.

   Optional: You might want to include a brief dedication or acknowledgements to; you might wish to make a brief statement about the artist (yourself) in 50 words or less.

9. Present your album to your group for feedback.

10. Present your album (or make it available where most appropriate) to community members, policy makers, and to anyone else with whom you wish to share it.

References and suggested reading

Attarian, Hourig (2009), Lifelines: Matrilineal narratives, Memory and identity, (Doctoral thesis), Montreal, McGill University, 319 p.


3.6 - ART INSTALLATION

Definition

By creating art installations of carefully arranged objects or by photographing or writing about ordinary objects, participants reflect on the significance of these things to their everyday lives. These collections of objects can include anything: drawings and photographs, books, erasers, and pens; clothes, hats, and shoes; cellphones and computers; rocks, bowls, tweezers, hammers, toys...anything.

As we gather, examine, and analyze objects, we can break through taken-for-granted beliefs and expectations to gain new insight into the meaning and structure of our experiences. Under scrutiny, objects can point to problems and forgotten stories, and can indicate solutions to personal and social issues.

Objectives

- To remember, recount, explore, and evaluate everyday experience.
- To describe issues and situations, using an accessible and multi-layered form of representation that invites reflection, and critique and that is targeted to a specific audience.
- To illustrate questions, problems, and possible solutions related to a research topic in a way that might influence policy or practice.

Underlying principles

Under research scrutiny, objects are entry points to experience, making us pay attention to the significance of things we so often overlook. Our use of and feelings towards everyday objects can reveal a lot about lives, identities, communities, work, social status, gender, relationships, and what is and isn’t important to us. Objects act as memory prompts by helping us remember events and issues. Focusing on objects is an effective way to find and tell the stories we might otherwise neglect.

Objects can be “read” as cultural texts, but the interpretation of objects is complex: objects are both personal and cultural. They have implicit and explicit meaning and can mean different things to different people. Objects are always in context. As such, thinking seriously about objects can lead simultaneously inward toward self-study and outward towards examination of community.
General protocol

Object projects usually take place over a series of small group meetings or workshops, respecting the spirit and principles outlined in Photovoice protocols and in general outlines of feminist participatory research. The first meeting should be used to outline and negotiate the processes and to initiate the search for appropriate objects.

1. Gather at least 10 objects that might be relevant in some way to the research theme. For example:

   - Contents of a purse, backpack, briefcase, drawer, shelf, etc.

   - Objects found in a particular setting: workplace, bedroom, kitchen, playground, schoolroom, garage, bathroom cabinet, community center, women’s shelter, hospital, daycare, foodbank, etc.

   - Everyday objects: clothes, hats, shoes, cell phones, tools, books, make up, cleaning products, paper, photographs, albums, chewing gum, dolls, cans, weapons, cutlery, pens, seeds, money, bus passes, scissors, passport, glasses, tires, beads, wool, string, bowls, notebooks, and so forth.

   - The supplies you gather do not have to be related to each other or go together in any obvious way. You can also choose to include a drawing or a description of something you would have liked to include in your collection but cannot, or something you wished existed but doesn’t.

2. Arrange the objects (or representations of objects) on a table and examine them. Make a list of them and if possible, photograph each one (even the photographs). For each item, indicate:

   - where it comes from
   - why you have it
   - how you came to have it
   - how you use it
   - how long you have had it
   - any memories or events or people or situations the object brings to mind
   - what feelings or emotions the object evokes for you
   - what it means to you, your relationship to the object
   - what the object might mean to others
   - any cultural or religious or identity elements related to the object
   - how this object might convey age, gender, and absence or presence of status/power
   - how this object might relate to your analysis of your experience
   - how this might convey something you want others to know
3. Alone, or in consultation with others during a workshop, choose no more than 5-9 items for your project. To guide your choices, consider which objects:

- are the most relevant to the research question or topic;
- might help people understand your lived reality;
- best represent your situation;
- might provoke the kind of question you want your target audience to ask;
- might provoke the kind of change you would like them to envision.

4. Make a rough draft of your object art project and share it with your research group:

   For an installation:
   - Think about the message you want to share with your target audience.
   - For your arrangement, experiment with the objects you have selected: arrange and rearrange them by putting them in different positions until you are satisfied.
   - Photograph or videotape your installation from different angles so that you can reconstitute it if need be.
   - You can add music or record your voice talking about the objects or what should be there but isn’t there. You can tell a story to convey your message.
   - Give a working title to your installation.

5. Participants are invited to display and talk about their installation with the other members of the group. Encourage them to ask questions, to give each other feedback, and, especially, to make suggestions on how to improve each person’s work for the presentation to the target audience.
6. Lead a group discussion about all the art. For instance, you can discuss:

   • What questions and themes are raised by the collections?

   • What research findings do they convey as a group?

   • What kind of whole do the parts made when presented in one show?

   • How can they be presented or grouped or ordered to make an effective presentation to the target audience?

7. With the help of the participants, plan and advertise the public vernissage.

8. Finalize titles, arrangements, statements about the artists, curatorial statements, constructions, and other content.

Variation to do in small groups: Annotated model displays and performances

   If a small group chooses to focus on clothes, accessories, or other props, they could plan, write, and rehearse a short performance piece where two or three people model or pose one or two “scenes” while others place signs strategically or act as commentators reading prepared texts about the significance of the clothes and objects. The performance should raise questions, or outline issues and problems, and possibly offer solutions. Contrast, comparison, and satirical elements can be effective in these kinds of displays.

References and suggested reading


